

WE CLAIM:

1. A harvester for gathering produce from one or more plants, the harvester comprising:
 - (a) a drive mechanism for automatically advancing the harvester along a first direction relative to the plants;
 - (b) a retractable conveyor mounted to and extending from the drive mechanism; and
 - (c) a sealing arrangement mounted at a first end of the retractable conveyor to maintain a predetermined distance between the first end of the retractable conveyor and at least one corresponding plant, the sealing arrangement including:
 - (i) a plurality of plates positioned between the harvester and the corresponding plant; and
 - (ii) a sensor bar positioned at the first end of the retractable conveyor, the sensor bar configured to engage the corresponding plant as the harvester travels along the first direction.
2. The harvester of claim 1, wherein the plurality of plates extend from the first end of the retractable conveyor, each of the plates being configured to overlap one another.
3. The harvester of claim 2, wherein the plates are rotatably mounted to the first end of the retractable conveyor such that the plates rotate from a first position to a second position when engaged with the corresponding plant to form a conforming seal as the harvester travels along the first distance.
4. The harvester of claim 3, wherein the sealing member includes a plurality of spring members configured to bias the plates to the first position.

5. The harvester of claim 1, wherein the sensor bar is an elongated bar extending from a leading end of the retractable conveyor to a trailing end of the retractable conveyor.
6. The harvester of claim 1, wherein the sensor bar includes a spring configured to bias the sensor bar such that the sensor bar is fully extended from the first end of the retractable conveyor when the bar is not engaged with a corresponding plant.
7. The harvester of claim 1, wherein the sealing arrangement includes a linkage assembly interconnected to the sensor bar, the linkage assembly being configured to extend and retract the retractable conveyor to maintain the predetermined distance between the first end of the retractable conveyor and the corresponding plant.
8. The harvester of claim 7, wherein the sealing arrangement further includes an actuator interconnected to the sensor bar, the actuator configured to receive an input signal from the sensor bar to actuate the linkage assembly for extending or retracting the retractable conveyor.
9. The harvester of claim 1, wherein each plate of the plurality of plates has a coupled end mounted to the first end of the retractable conveyor and a free end, the coupled end having a first width, the free end having a second width, the second width being greater than the first width.
10. The harvester of claim 1, wherein the sensor bar extend a first distance from the first end of the retractable conveyor, and the sealing arrangement extends a second distance from the first end of the retractable conveyor, the first distance being less than the second distance.
11. The harvester of claim 1, wherein the plurality of plates are rotatably mounted to the first end of the retractable conveyor.

12. The harvester of claim 11, wherein the plurality of plates are configured to rotate in a direction generally opposite the first direction.

13. A harvester for gathering produce from one or more plants, the harvester comprising:

- (a) a drive mechanism for automatically advancing the harvester along a first direction relative to the plants;
- (b) a retractable conveyor mounted to and extending from the drive mechanism; and
- (c) a sealing arrangement mounted at a first end of the retractable conveyor to maintain a predetermined distance between the first end of the retractable conveyor and at least one corresponding plant, the sealing arrangement including:
 - (i) a plurality of plates extending from the first end of the retractable conveyor, the plurality of plates being rotatably mounted to the first end of the retractable conveyor and configured such that the plates overlap one another;
 - (ii) a plurality of spring members arranged to bias the rotatably mounted plates to a first extended position;
 - (iii) a sensor bar positioned at the first end of the retractable conveyor, the sensor bar being configured to engage the corresponding plant as the harvester travels along the first direction;
 - (iv) a bias member configured to bias the sensor bar to a fully extended position when the sensor bar is not engaged with the corresponding plant;
 - (v) a linkage assembly operably interconnected to the sensor bar to extend and retract the retractable conveyor relative to the drive mechanism to maintain the predetermined distance between the first end of the retractable conveyor and the corresponding plant.

14. The harvester of claim 13, wherein the sensor bar is an elongated bar extending from a leading end of the retractable conveyor to a trailing end of the retractable conveyor.

15. The harvester of claim 13, wherein the bias member is a spring configured to bias the sensor bar to the fully position when the sensor bar is not engaged with a corresponding plant.

16. The harvester of claim 13, wherein the plurality of plates are configured to rotate in a direction generally opposite the first direction.